

HOW THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS AND SMARTER BALANCED ASSESSMENTS PREPARE STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE

Today's students are preparing to enter a globally competitive world requiring more skills and knowledge than ever before. However, more than one-third of all students are not ready for the rigor of higher education and will enroll in remedial education once they enter college, costing students both time and money and decreasing their odds of graduating.

To ensure all students are ready for success after high school, Common Core State Standards were established. College faculty and education experts around the country developed the Common Core State Standards with college expectations and college graduation as the finish line. The kindergarten through 12th grade standards have been adopted by more than 40 other states, creating educational equity across school districts and states. Smarter Balanced assessments, which are aligned to the new standards, provide a way for teachers to measure student progress on those standards throughout the year to help ensure students are on the pathway to college readiness and success.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

- **What are the Common Core standards and how do they ensure students will enter college better prepared?** Common Core State Standards are a set of expectations for what every student should know and be able to do in math and English language arts at each grade level. The standards were created by K-12 and higher education experts across the country to ensure all students, regardless of location or background, acquire a strong, shared foundation in math and English. The new standards reflect what students will need to know to be successful in college.
- **How are the Common Core standards different than previous K-12 standards?** The shifts in the math standards include a greater focus on key concepts so students establish a strong foundation before moving to the next level, connecting what students learn across grades to reinforce their knowledge, and moving beyond memorization so students can explain the thinking behind their answers. The shifts in the English language arts standards build students' understanding of how to use and understand a variety of materials. This includes a deeper focus on knowledge through content - rich nonfiction, reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence, and regular practice with complex text.
- **What are Smarter Balanced assessments?** Smarter Balanced is a high-quality assessment system aligned to Common Core standards that provides accurate information and tools for teachers to help students succeed. The new assessments are better at measuring what students really know and can do. They emphasize how students apply the math and English concepts they are learning to real world problems and rely less on memorization of facts. The Smarter Balanced assessment system includes formative and summative assessments

to measure student growth and adjust classroom lessons to student learning needs. The exams are administered in grades 3 through 8 and grade 11.

- **What does college- and career-ready mean?** Being college- and career-ready means that a high school graduate has the skills needed to qualify for and succeed in college credit-bearing courses and/or in the postsecondary job training necessary for their chosen career without the need for remedial coursework. Common Core helps ensure students are ready for either path.



"One of the most important goals of the Common Core State Standards is that they provide the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college, career, and life. Determining that the standards meet this goal was accomplished by comparing them to the best state standards, examining them in relations to previously developed college and career readiness standards, and having them reviewed by post-secondary instructors who teach entry-level courses."

- DAVID CONLEY, chief executive officer, and chief strategy officer of Educational Policy Improvement Center
(*The Common Core State Standards: Insight into Their Development and Purpose*, by David T. Conley)

• **What do the Smarter Balanced scores mean?**

Students' Smarter Balanced scores will fall into one of four different levels. Students scoring a 4 are on track to be college- and career-ready and should be encouraged to enroll in dual credit courses in 11th and 12th grade, earning college credit while still in high school. Students who score a 3 are also on target to be college- and career-ready by the end of 12th grade. A score of a 1 or 2 does NOT disqualify a student from attending college. Students can reduce the time and expense of remediation by working hard during 12th grade and taking advantage of transition courses designed to get students on a path to college- and career-readiness. Students can use the Smarter Balanced scores to help prepare and plan so they can be successful throughout their education, including the often-challenging transitions to high school and college.

• **How do the Smarter Balanced assessments create a personalized pathway for students to be college ready?** The Common Core standards help ensure students are college- and career-ready. The Smarter Balanced assessments help teachers and parents measure a student's progress toward that goal. This timely information can help inform the student's High School & Beyond Plan, which is designed to bring parents/guardians, educators, and students together to develop the student's personalized pathway toward college- and career-readiness. Each student maintains a plan that outlines education and career goals, and the courses, exams, and experiences necessary to get them there.

• **How are the higher education and the K-12 communities helping students become college-ready?** To help students transition to college and career pathways, teams of Washington state K-12 teachers and higher education faculty are doing the following:

- Collaboratively developing and piloting transition courses: Bridge to College Mathematics and Bridge to College English Language Arts. These transition courses will be offered to high school seniors who need additional help to prepare for entering and being successful in college. Multiple school districts across the state are piloting the courses in 2014-15. Based on outcomes from the pilot courses, they will be revised during summer 2015 and scaled broadly across the state beginning in 2015-16.
- Colleges of Education are incorporating the Common Core State Standards in pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development programs.

- The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction is creating a Digital Library of resources and offering professional learning opportunities to teachers of all grades.

• **Are the Smarter Balanced assessments designed to be used in college admissions and will the Smarter Balanced assessments use the SAT and ACT to help set its performance standards?**

No, the Smarter Balanced assessments are not meant to be used as college admissions exams. However college admissions exams including the SAT and ACT, along with feedback from higher education community and K-12 community and other benchmark standards, are sources of data the Smarter Balanced assessments will use to guide its setting of performance standards. Currently higher-education experts are helping determine the standards-setting process.

• **What is the timeline?** Common Core standards were fully implemented in Washington school districts in the 2013-14 school year. Beginning in 2014-15, students will take Smarter Balanced assessments in math and English language arts that are aligned to Common Core.

RESOURCES:

The websites below provide more information about Common Core, Smarter Balanced, and the skills that students need to succeed:

- Ready Washington: www.readywa.org
- OSPI's Common Core section: www.k12.wa.us/CoreStandards
- Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: www.smarterbalanced.org
- Common Core State Standards: www.corestandards.org
- Informative three-minute video and Myths & Facts about Common Core: www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/myths-vs-facts
- Core to College: www.c2cwa.wordpress.com
- Higher Ed for Higher Standards: www.higheredforhigherstandards.org

Funding for this work is provided as part of the Improving Student Learning at Scale grant opportunity: www.wsac.wa.gov/isls-group